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THE HEROINES SHOWCASE

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MS. MARVEL: An Interview with Chris Claremont *by Margaret O'Connell*

WHY WOULD THE BATTLE-SENSE OF A KREE WARRIOR MISS THE FACT THAT HER LIFE HAS BEEN ENDANGERED IN FIVE OUT OF ELEVEN ISSUES BY THIS BLASTED THING?
GREAT PAMA! — ASK MY WRITER!
Greenleaf 77

THS: Why does Ms. Marvel have so many covers that look almost like symbolic rape scenes, where she's got half her clothes torn off and is being beaten up by a villain?

CHRIS: See, part of the rationale with Ms. Marvel – which is part of the reason for the covers on #17 and 19 – is that we want a book that a teenage kid, a boy, will walk into the store, and he'll see this cover, and he'll buy it, because he's just looking at a good-looking woman.

THS: It's surprising to hear someone admit that that's what goes on.

CHRIS: Well, I'm feeling feisty these days.

But that's the selling point. It's derived from the old pulp selling points in the '40's – you know, you put a good-looking woman on the cover in a state of vulnerability and undress, and theoretically that'll sell books. Well, it might be fine for Conan or even Spider-Man or the Avengers, but the problem as I see it when you have Ms. Marvel is that the scantily-clad, defenseless-looking woman on the cover is the hero of the book.

You look at the first 15 covers of *Ms. Marvel,* and for an awful percentage of them, she is the victim. She is being smashed, she is being beaten.

First issue, she smashes through the pages of the book. Second issue, she punches the Scorpion. Third issue, she's blasted by the Destructor. Fourth issue, she's diving for a box.

Fifth issue, the Vision is attacking her. The sixth issue, she's being smashed by Grotesk. The seventh issue, she's being blasted by Modok. Eighth issue, she's being drowned. The ninth issue, she's being attacked by Death-bird. Tenth issue, she's being attacked by Deathbird. Eleventh issue, she's being attacked by rock monsters, twelfth issue, she's frozen in amber by the Elementals.

Thirteen – she's bashing people on the *Constitution.* Fourteen, she's in the air fighting Steeplejack. Fifteen, she's landing, with Tiger Shark holding Nita. Sixteen, she's being crushed

by an octopus. Seventeen is the rape – you know, the gun cover. Eighteen is a symbolic cover. Nineteen, she's on her stomach on the floor. Twenty, she's bashing, finally, she's just got a lizard by the tail and then wham! wham! wham!

But for most of the covers she is not dynamic, she is not forceful, she is not – she hasn't got pizzazz. There is nothing to make a kid say, "Hey, I wanna read this!"

And unfortunately the story and inside reinforced that initial judgment. With very few exceptions, the book has taken literally 20 issues to get its head together, to get the art together. Dave (Cockrum)'s issue satisfies Stan's dictum as far as good-looking women, and it satisfies my own criteria as far as a good story. You know, it's good action, there's solid characterization, Carol Danvers/Ms. Marvel is acting in a heroic, star fashion. She is decisive, she is upfront, she is – every bit as admirable and courageous and everything as Spider-Man, or Captain America, or Thor. Which is what she should have been from the beginning.

Unfortunately, it's taken almost two years to find the book's voice, and it may be too late. The sales have always been very weak on this book, after the first issue. The rule of thumb has been that a lot of people bought the first issue and a lot of people didn't like it. So in a sense we're fighting a last ditch battle to save it.

THS: Well, in the first issue she was set up almost like a supporting character of Spider-Man.

CHRIS: Well, that has to do with things that I have theories on, but they're not really worth going into. Yeah, she didn't get her own supporting cast until the sixth issue, really, which is when I started doing it for real.

THS: But then even you would have her out of the office for about three issues at a time and you'd really wonder, didn't anyone notice she was gone?

CHRIS: Oh, well, she gets fired in issue #22.

THS: I'm really happy to hear that, because it seemed to me that she should have been fired about 10 issues ago.

CHRIS: She shouldn't have had that job in the first place. You know, there's no way, if I were a publisher, that I would give a woman who up until a year ago was a security chief for NASA the job of a magazine editorship.

THS: I know!

CHRIS: I mean it's crazy.

THS: Yeah, she comes in and says, "Well, I have a rep, so you have to pay me $30,00 a year." She has a rep as a security chief who couldn't catch Captain Marvel!

CHRIS: Well, what she's going to become is a science fiction writer, and a freelance journalist.

THS: She's certainly well equipped for that!

CHRIS: Yeah, well, that's the point. It's something that is logical in terms of her character, it's something that'll give her mobility, it'll enable her to get out, we can put her in good situations. We can create a viable book. We can get in good supporting characters in terms of her agent, her publisher, people she knows in the Village – I mean, within a space of five or six blocks, we've got Jean Grey, we've got Doc Strange, all manner of people.

The original concept of the book was something that I couldn't work with at all. Unfortunately, I couldn't come up with anything that I could work with. There were times when I'd tell Archie (Goodwin) I'd like off the book, because I wasn't getting it. There was nothing for me, at least, to hang a handle on. She didn't register believably to me, and if I can't believe it, then how the hell can I expect an audience to believe it?

It's so frustrating. There are thousands of ways Ms. Marvel could have been created, and, you know, this is probably the worst once conceivable.

THS: Well, I think now that you finally have the origin of Carol Danvers (in #19) – that was really a terrific issue. I just couldn't believe that. It was so much better than anything that had been in the book before –

CHRIS: Well, she's got context now. You know where she's come from. You know what kind of an environment she came from. It makes her being what she is now all the more – it makes it relevant. Looking back over the last 20 issues, there are only three issues that are

worth a damn, of mine and I think of Gerry's and that's the two Carmine issues and Dave's. Because those are the only ones that are consistent – she has a past that's her own.

There's a double irony involved, because her brother got sent to college (instead of her), and halfway through he got drafted. And he ended up getting killed in Nam. So it was all for nothing anyway.

THS: What about her other brother?

CHRIS: Well, I'm not sure what he's doing now. I haven't figured him out yet. He's either up in Boston or he's at school. Or working his way through college.

The thing is that all Carol wants or has ever wanted or will ever want is to be accepted as herself. And she wants to deal with life on her own terms. Which is something her father would never let her do. To him, she had very specific responsibilities: grow up, meet a guy, get married, have kids. And he doesn't understand it. And he didn't understand her when she joined the Air Force.

Her mother, on the other hand, does understand her, appreciates her and supports her. But her mother made her choice 25, 30 years ago – whether to make her own life or to become Joe Danvers' wife. She made a decision that it was more important for her to be with this man and to play that role, than to make her own life. Because she had options at the end of the war – kind of. But she made the choice, for whatever reason. Carol's made her choice and her father just doesn't understand that.

But you know, all I have ever tried to do in writing male or female characters is do people that I would like to meet, that I would like to know, people that are part and parcel of the people that I know. And the ones that work best, I think, are the ones where I achieve that. The X-Men, for example. Misty and Colleen (from *Iron Fist*).

A considerable number of letters found the cover on #17 and a lot of them are finding the cover on #19 offensive. The gun cover – you couldn't get more Freudian if you tried. The original cover concept was rejected. Dave did a cover for #19 which had Ms. Marvel on her feet, fighting – Ronan's looming over her and blasting her, but she's on her feet, her costume isn't torn, Cap is chained in the background, and the Supreme Intelligence is on the screen yelling, "Go, Ronan, go!" or words to that effect. And it was rejected because it wasn't sexy enough. So they had John Romita Jr. re-do it with her on the floor, in pain, her costume torn open, Cap straining in the background. Me, I think all the tits and ass in the world, if you'll pardon the expression, won't do any good if we don't have a solid story to back it up.

Again, there's a dictum on Ms. Marvel that as much as possible we are to portray her in as attractive and sexy a way as we can. For example, there was a minor altercation – in #20, there's a scene where she's wandering around in a desert. And I told Dave, "She's in a desert, put her in blue jeans and a workshirt and boots." 'Cause if anyone I know were walking around the desert, that's what they'd be wearing – you know, long pants, because there are cacti and things that bite, and a rugged shirt. Well, we got told that that was wrong, that it wasn't very attractive. So Dave compromised, had her tie her shirt up under her breasts. We were, in jest, saying, "Well, what should we do, put her in hot pants and white boots? Make her look like a Dallas Cowboys cheerleader – Cowgirl?" And they said, "Yeah, why not?"

THS: Oh, God.

CHRIS: " 'Cause she's the editor of a magazine!" They don't – It's two strains. We've got a character here who is supposedly 30 years old and mature and responsible and all that, and yet we want to make her look like, – we want it to be "Charlie's Angels."

THS: Yeah.

CHRIS: Be successful. And unfortunately she's got more brains than all three Charlie's Angels put together.

This is always the tug of war in a book in comics.

I mean, I have nothing against half-naked women, or men, for that matter, in books. I

think it's great, assuming it's consistent with the story – fine. But we make it – it's so surreptitious when we do it that we keep making it cheap.

THS: It's almost as if there's a cue card saying, "Leer here" or something.

CHRIS: Yeah, exactly. It's a pain in the neck. And unfortunately it reflects more on women than on men. You know, you can always put a guy in a G-string and nobody'll scream. But put a woman in one – the Code screams bloody murder. But, that's life.

If you deal with it realistically, to a point, if you have fun with it, it'll work, I think. But a lot of people are self-conscious. Like I got a letter from a woman who was really upset, in issue #17, when Carol and Gianelli roll down the hill and he kisses her and she goes, "Frank!" "What?" "Lemme up!" "No." Smooch! and then, "Later . . . " And she said, "Oh, how dare you write that scene!" Really a very screwed-up person.

But my logic in the scene is, Carol has nothing to be afraid of. If he steps out of line, she can punch him into New Jersey. No one that she knows of can force anything on her unless she wants it. Which gives her a tremendous feeling of confidence, of value, of herself. She is a very centered character, and that's one of the things I like about her – that she doesn't have to take any bullshit from anybody, except Jameson.

THS: Was there any particular reason that Marvel decided to do Ms. Marvel at this time? Did they just think that it was time to try a book starring a woman again?

CHRIS: Well, as your own article ("How To Write Superheroines the Marvel Way," in *Seduction of the Innocent* #1) said, we'd been trying to do a woman main character for the last few years. The main argument against it is the same argument that's always been applied against science fiction in comics, that it doesn't sell. My feeling in response to that was that until recently we'd never sat down and created a female lead character with the same degree of thought, consideration, respect, talent that we have our male characters. Or even just inspiration. We have never had a female character that equaled Spider-Man.

THS: That's a tall order.

CHRIS: Yeah, but that's the yardstick. If we ever did a female character that was the equal of Spider-Man, excepting those characters that are being done now, and it didn't sell, then maybe you'd have an argument, that female characters don't sell, that there's no market for them.

What we had was the first – The Cat and Shanna the She-Devil and Night Nurse – that trilogy – it was like, "Hey, let's try it and see what happens!" And we got burned immediately. The books didn't hang together right. And Shanna stuck around the longest of the three, and at that time got to be a moderate embarrassment, depending on your point of view. I find – well.

The Cat, both as The Cat and as Tigra, never worked. Hellcat seems to work, but basically she works in the context of the Defenders.

THS: She's a different personality, too.

CHRIS: Yeah, she's a different person. Then there was kind of a lull. We always wanted to do a Black Widow – we kept trying to do a Black Widow series, but somehow that never caught on, whether it was the character, or the stories, or the art after Gene (Colan) left the book, no one can really say. It just never drew people in.. It may be that the Widow is just – like the Vision, is a great supporting character, who to work needs to be seen in the context of a group or another character. There are certain characters, male and female, who are born second bananas. Spock, for example, in *Star Trek*, would never work (on his own). My feeling is he would never work as a lead, simply because you need the interplay of Spock and the other crew members to work.

THS: Actually, it's funny, because when you said that in the other interview (also in *Seduction of the Innocent*), when I was thinking about it later, I thought that one character who does fit that description is Sub-Mariner. I mean, he's had his own book several times, but never really seems to work, because he's always just declaiming these things and the villain just declaims right back at him. There's no relief from this really melodramatic, high-flown dialogue, as there is in *The Invaders*, where the other Invaders do kid around and behave in a more down-to-earth manner.

CHRIS: Well, there it's hard to say. I mean, what kind of Subby do you have? Is it the Subby who's out to destroy humanity? Is he a noble hero, a noble villain, an ignoble hero, an ignoble villain? It's hard. How do kids relate to an undersea monarch? I mean, it doesn't have any of

the attraction that Spider-Man does. Even so, he lasted a fairly long time. Again, you could make the argument, would the book have died if it had stayed Thomas and Buscema? It's hard to say. The reasons for a book dying or being cancelled – I mean, if we all knew why a book got zapped, we would all be millionaires. I would be sitting in Stan's office.

By all absolute accounts, *Iron Fist* should have worked, because it had a dynamite creative team in me, Byrne, and Dan Adkins, it had good stories, the character worked, but it never really sold. I mean, it was a respectable sale, but it never hit super-stardom.

But getting back to the female characters – there was a hiatus after the experiments with The Cat and Shanna and everything. People began bring in female characters again as supporting characters – me with the X-Men, with – well, Storm was there to begin with, but then revamping Jean into Phoenix.

THS: And bringing in Moira McTaggart.

CHRIS: And Moira McTaggart. Misty and Colleen in *Iron Fist*. Marv (Wolfman) actually led us all, picking up from what Archie did, led it all off with Rachel Van Helsing (in *Tomb of Dracula*), to a large extent. We began upgrading all the females who were around. And finally, I don't know, about two years ago, it was decided we should try again to do a female character. The times had changed, too. Wonder Woman had a lot more favorable publicity – the Steinem book had come out, the TV show was going great guns, "Bionic Woman" was a big success – women were in.

THS: Really in this time.

CHRIS: And there was a theory that maybe the audience was changing, now. It's been three or four years, maybe there are more female readers out there, who are interested. Maybe the boy readers' consciousness has been raised sufficiently so that they will buy a book starring a female.

So, Stan – Stan has always wanted to do a Ms. Marvel. 'Cause the name is so alliterative. You know, we're Marvel Comics, we've got Captain Marvel, we should have Ms. Marvel, or Miss Marvel. The original idea was to revamp Jean Grey into Ms. Marvel.

THS: Yeah, that's what everyone seemed to assume it was going to be.

CHRIS: Except me. I fought it tooth and nail. 'Cause we'd already revamped her into Phoenix.

Then Stan sat down with Marv and Steve Gerber and they tried to come up with a concept. And they tried, and they tried, and they tried, and Stan came up with a whole mess of good concepts that he threw out because he thought they weren't good enough. Steve came up with some concepts Stan didn't like, Marv came up, they didn't like – it batted around and around and around.

Then Gerry (Conway) left as editor to become a freelance writer, and he got the Ms. Marvel assignment. And all that came after that is from him.

With Spider-Woman it's the same thing. We've got a Spider-Man, hell, why not give 'em a Spider-Woman? The idea was that – Stan's ideas, and the rest is history – it sold incredibly well.

THS: Do you think that'll keep up?

CHRIS: Well, the *Marvel Spotlight* sold in the upper 50's. It sold easily 15 or 20 points better than the issues around it.

THS: Oh, God.

CHRIS: Well, that's why Stan said, "Let's do it!" It was originally supposed to be a one-shot, just to register the trademark and the name. To prevent DC or anyone else from coming out with a Spider-Woman.

THS: Yeah, Marv Wolfman said something at Creation, I think, about some Saturday morning cartoon was going to have a character called Spider-Woman.

CHRIS: There is one.

THS: But they called her something else (Web Woman).

CHRIS: Yeah, they had to. It's the same – there's a magazine over in England called *Starlord* and Marvel's trying to see if they can get them to change the name, because of our Star-Lord character.

ESPINOZA
GW

So, Marv was then given the assignment of making some sense out of it. It was a great one-issue story, but a lousy way to do a series. So the six issues or whatever she was in *Marvel Two-In-One* was actually the shaking down, the evolving of the origin of the character, so that when she appeared in her own book, she was actually fairly well thought-out. And then, the sales on that started off well; I don't know how much the fact that Marv isn't writing it any more will affect it. That's where it stands.

THS: You said before that Ms. Marvel's sales were pretty shaky. I've actually heard a rumor that it's been cancelled.

CHRIS: I don't know. As of when I last saw Jim (Shooter) last week, the book will survive as a bi-monthly. Barring major disasters or edicts from above, at least three more issues should see print, simply because they're all done, and they won't throw away three thousand dollars' worth of art and story. Beyond that it's anyone's guess. I'm working on the assumption that the book won't be cancelled, obviously. The argument we have is that we'll wait and see how Dave (Cockrum)'s issues do, whether the new costume, the new logo, the new everything, will make a difference. Dave has that knack of being an instantly recognizable, instantly popular artist. If we ballyhoo it enough, and we can get all the kids who really dug *X-Men* to at least pick it up for two issues, to bump the sales enough so that we can give Vosburg a good running start for his issues, then we may have a fighting chance, at least to stay bi-monthly. I don't know when, if ever, we'll get back to monthly, because you're down this far, it's a hell of a long climb back up again. Especially these days, with the sales in general just being so rocky.

But – another argument, another thing that prompted us to bring in female characters again, was the popularity of Red Sonja – outside – See, a lot of this is done not so much for the comic aesthetic as for merchandising. However popular the books are, there is a market in terms of advertising and promotion – last year, last summer one of the characters at Great Adventure (the amusement park in New Jersey) was Ms. Marvel

THS: Right, I saw her on the commercial on TV.

CHRIS: All the stuff that Frank Thorne and his Sonja ladies do –

THS: So Ms. Marvel has kept going this long just because Marvel did have this sort of commitment to women characters?

CHRIS: A, that, B, it's part of the package that Universal – they bought the film rights to 12 characters, and Ms. Marvel is one of them. So on the option that someday there will be a film produced, it's worth it to keep the book alive, for the two or three years that the film option is in existence. You know, that way at least the kids'll know who she is. Of course, if the film Ms. Marvel is the original and we're doing this one, well . . . You win a few, you lose a few.

THS: You'd have to go back to the original, like they did with Wonder Woman.

CHRIS: If they have any sense, they'll go to the new one, which is a far better character. But again, a lot of the decisions made have very little to do with the actual comic itself, the business decisions. The creative decisions are a matter of instinct – my instinct, Roger Stern's instincts, Stan's instincts – we all mesh 'em together and see what happens.

Again, Ms. Marvel at this point is probably the best Ms. Marvel that could be in the 20 issues that it's been done, at least that I could do. But she's not – it's the best silk purse you've ever made out of a sow's ear. It's the best that we could do with a bad beginning, let me say. It's like we remade her totally, yet we're still bound by what has gone before. It's not the same as if we sat down and created a brilliant character right off the bat. She may become brilliant in the future, but that's gonna be – interesting to see.

THS: How did you get involved in writing Ms. Marvel in the first place? Conway seemed to leave very abruptly –

CHRIS: He quit. Well, it was a contract dispute. He went back to DC. Literally overnight. And the week before I began my honeymoon, Archie called me up and said, "Gerry just quit. Do you want to write *Team-Up* and *Ms. Marvel*?" And I said, "Sure." And he said, "I need a *Team-Up* plot, a *Ms. Marvel* script, and a *Ms. Marvel* plot immediately." And I figured, what the hell, for the chance to write a John Buscema issue of anything, which is the one and only John Buscema job I've ever written. I said, "Sure." And I finished the script Tuesday – well, Wednesday morning, and I left for England Wednesday night.

THS: Oh, God!

CHRIS: When I say Wednesday morning, I mean literally 2 a.m. And that was it. I wrote the plot of my first issue literally overnight first two issues – and even then the schedules were so screwed up, the book was so late, that before I came back, Archie and Jim Shooter had to plot the fifth issue.

So the unfortunate thing there was that my first plotted issue, the fourth issue, Jim Mooney's first ended the origin storyline, with AIM, and the Doomsday Man and all that stuff. Archie's issue was a sort of recap, running in place situation. So the first issue where I really sat down and tried to create supporting character situations, was #6.

And again, what people have seen since, in the year or so since then, on Ms. Marvel, has been a working out of problems of the book, things that really should have been done before the first issue hit the stands. The analogy is like coming into a theater, and instead of seeing a completed play, seeing the building of the scenery, the technical run-through, the hanging of the lights, the reading of the script – and the performance of the play. All the bones are showing, all the scenery. What it means, essentially is I was making my mistakes in public, on the page. If I went in a wrong direction, I was stuck with it – I mean a wrong characterizational direction. That's where all the confusion in the book concerning her split personality comes from, why at the end of the third issue she says, "I know who I am," and then it takes her until issue 13 to realize, "Oh, right, I'm two – " – to figure out what that means. 'Cause I said, "I know who I am," and then thought, "What does this mean?" See, that was written off the top of my head. The next issue was plotted off the top of my head. Then I had to sit down and read those issues and say, "What've I got?" I had a mishmosh, nothing that I felt I could relate to. So I had to fix it. And I had to fix it and fulfill a monthly schedule, keep an inker and penciller busy, keep the scripts coming, keep the plots coming. And because it was such a new concept, there was no real option for fill-ins, because no one else knew anything about the character either.

That's why with the X-Men, for instance, when the Bill Mantlo/Bob Brown fill-in finally saw print, two and a half years after it had been pencilled, I rewrote it. There's hardly a line in there that was in Bill's original script, simply because when he wrote that issue, the X-Men were an issue old. I didn't know what I was doing, Dave had a vague idea what he was doing. We didn't know who the characters were. That issue could have gone in then and worked, because Bill was pulling off the same stuff I was, the Len Wein giant issue. But two years later, when it saw print, we had twenty issues of me. The characters had developed totally different voices. It's a shame, we should have just xeroxed the original lettering and just held them up side by side to illustrate the difference in how Colossus speaks and how they relate to each other and how Nightcrawler acts, Storm, all of them, interact, far differently now than they

did in the beginning.

So it had to be rewritten, and a similar thing happened with Ms. Marvel. The Ms. Marvel that is done now is nothing like the Ms. Marvel that was done two years ago, a year and a half ago. A fill-in done then would stick out like a sore thumb, simply because the character has evolved beyond the original concept, I hope.

THS: Okay, Conway seemed to have built a lot of very sort of inhibiting factors into the character that made it difficult to really change her a lot, and apparently some of those were just in the whole concept, not even in the scripts he did himself. For instance, in the second script that he did, he said that she had to have the circuitry in the costume, but I think there he just said that was what enabled her to fly. I don't think he actually said straight out that that was what gave her all her powers.

CHRIS: No, it didn't. I added it. I figured if you're gonna have circuitry, it might as well work, for more than just flying, which seemed absurd. Again, that was one of my big bitches with the book when I took it over, one of my first realizations, was that we already had -- I mean, I had her say it herself, in issue 6, the one where Modok kidnapped her. We already had one character with a copyright on transistorized body armor -- Iron Man. You know, it's bad enough her being a distaff Captain Marvel without being a distaff Captain Marvel/Iron Man at the same time. It's very bad.

One of the reasons Stan said in an interview that Iron Man never took off into the popularity stratospheres is because his powers are not his, they're the suit. Take away the suit and there's nothing left except Tony Stark. You know, beyond the limits of a normal man, he's helpless. It's the same thing with Ms.

Marvel – what is there admirable about a character who wears a suit? The powers have to be hers. But again, there is a perfect example of what I mean by the sow's ear/silk purse analogy. The whole 19th issue was designed solely to explain the inconsistencies in her origin. It took me two years to figure it out, but that was it, that is the origin. That's what the suit did, that's where it came from, it wasn't radiation, it was this, well, it was this, well, it was radiation, but, you know . . .

But these are things that should have been thought out before. See, there's a very bad habit around here that we used to have, that we're trying to get away from, saying, "Hey, let's do this book!" and then putting it on the schedule, and it immediately makes it a month late. So that from the start you're playing catch-up and you don't have time to think the concept through and say, "Is this wrong? Could this be done better? Is this different? Is this good, is this bad, is this indifferent?" You just do it. Again, that was the flaw with Captain Britain, which I did for England. Having to put it out on a weekly schedule, there was no time to think anything, you just had to boom, come up with a plot, boom, come up with a plot, boom, come upwith a plot.

We're getting away from that now with the Micronauts series, and it won't be scheduled until two or three issues are finished. That's being done with the Sub-Mariner story, too. It won't be scheduled until two or three issues are finished and in the house. And in truth we should be doing that with all new concepts, simply because if there is something wrong, you've got time to realize it and time to fix it. Too much stuff is deliberately let by because there's no time to do anything. You weigh the damage to the continuity and credibility of the book against the real money it's costing in late charges. That's unfortunately a conflict we all go through every now and then, usually every day.

But as to whatever inconsistencies Gerry put into the book – I don't know what his thinking was, I don't know where it came from, what kind of input he had, what kind of input he got. All I have to go on really is what everyone else has to go on, which are the two issues and three plots that were there. You know, I guess the person to hassle is Gerry, next time he's in town.

THS: The thing that struck me with that bit with the circuitry in the costume is that there's a certain tendency, when you have a superwoman, to make her powers come from some gimmick, not really from her. They did that with Wonder Woman on the TV show. I just watched the rerun of the new origin episode last week

CHRIS: Oh, I missed that.

THS: – and they're all Amazons and when they're on the island they have all these powers, but then her mother gives her this belt and says, "Well, without this magic belt, when you leave the island, you'll be just an ordinary woman." And I thought that was so outrageous, 'cause that wasn't even in the comic.

CHRIS: Well, you know, you're right. I think to that extent Storm and Phoenix work better than most simply because their abilities are inherent. Even Phoenix's are an extension of herself.

THS: Okay, someone else (Valeria Beasley) had written an article about Ms. Marvel that she showed me at Julycon, and about the most startling thing she said in it was that to her, Ms. Marvel seemed like a male character in drag. Her rationale for saying this was that most of Ms. Marvel's powers were what she called "masculine powers" – you know, they're aggressive ones, she hits people, and stuff like that – and all she had of the so-called feminine powers is the seventh sense. I didn't agree with that part at all, but I did see how she could sort of get the idea that in stereotypical terms Ms. Marvel is more masculine than feminine because as Ms. Marvel, she's always had this very sort of macho personality and even as Carol Danvers, she seems to be being self-consciously hard as nails most of the time. She's always screaming at her staff for small mistakes and stuff like that, trying not to show any weakness or vulnerability at all.

CHRIS: Okay. To go back: again, this is an example of rationales for existing realities, in part. Dave and I had a lot of discussions about that, too, because he did not like presenting her punching, physically decking people. He felt it was wrong for it did not sit well with him. So he tried to find different ways of portraying her fighting – you know, judo as opposed to a punch to the jaw.

The difficulty is that her powers are physical. She is essentially very strong, very fast, very agile. Her powers are – well, they're physical. She does not shoot rays, like Iron Man. She hasn't got a hammer, like Thor. She can't call down elements. She can't stretch. All she can do, really, is mix it in and punch people. That, unfortuanately, we can't change. We can't suddenly invent eye beams or nail beams or whatever. Phoenix and Storm, on the other hand, are more, quote, "feminine" in orientation because their powers can keep their foe at a distance. They don't need to touch anyone to physically affect them. Ms. Marvel does. In that she probably is more like the stereotyped traditional male character.

On the other hand, all she's doing is what male lead characters in comics have been doing for years, which is taking dramatic center stage of a book, which I don't think she has taken until the last – well, maybe in the Carmine issues, but definitely in Dave's, not before Dave's first issue.

The hard as nails element, again, is a part of Carol Danvers' personality long before – see, again, I think one of Gerry's mistakes was making her an established character, Carol Danvers. We're now totally restricted – and then violating the elements that already existed.

We knew Carol Danvers was a security chief, that she was a woman holding a very responsible position in NASA, security chief of Cape Kennedy – you gotta be good. And especially if you look like you're in your twenties, which she did. Now all of a sudden she's a hot shot journalist. Where did that come from? You know, you can't explain that by saying, "It's something I've always wanted to do since high school." So we had – but then again I had to justify: how does she get to be security chief at NASA? If she has a four year college education, she's only been working for two or three years. You don't go from college to security cheif at Cape Kennedy in two years. We're keeping her in the below-thirty age bracket – she's about 28, 29. But if she doesn't have four years of college, how come she's security chief at Cape Kennedy? You're blocked either way.

So the rationale I came up with is that she joined the Air Force after high school – she served in various underhanded capacities: espionage, counter-espionage, things like that, the whole element in the flashback reference to Rossi, which gave her sufficient reputation in police fields that she could manage to be a security chief, and experience, and clout, at a young age, that she would not normally have. So we gave her like six years in that, and then said well, she for some reason had to leave Air Force Intelligence and NASA said, "We need a security chief." They send Danvers to Cape Kennedy. Boom. And then for some reason she quits.

The problem here is that her entire background that we knew of before Ms. Marvel was very hard, very, for want of a better term, alpha (type A – the hard-driving, aggressive type of personality surveys show is more prone to heart attacks, ulcers, and other "executive" health problems), very traditionally male. She was a woman doing a man's job and perhaps, in the early issues, overcompensating. You know, she was either hard as nails or collapsing into Captain Marvel's arms, with a whimper. But again, we had things that we had to work from. We couldn't just invent things out of whole cloth, which is much easier. So the hard as nails aspect – yes, she is. But that's not something we can change. We can modify it, we can present sides to it, but we can't lose it.

Again, part of the confusion there is that it took me a much longer time than usual to find my footing with the character. I didn't really begin to like her as a person until #19 – well. #20. And if you don't like the character, you can't write them properly. At least I can't.

So, yes, in part I agree with what this lady says. She does exhibit a number of traditionally male character traits. I am not totally convinced that that's bad – I mean in the context of the comic book industry. This is quite a semantic game, but I would say that she's not so much exhibiting traditionally heroic – comic book heroic – traits. She's a woman who's a star of her own book.

THS: Well, I don't think there's anything wrong with her punching people. I just found it a little hard to take after a few issues of her acting as if she were trying to out-macho the men over even the simplest things – out-shouting J. Jonah Jameson every time he opens his mouth, stuff like that.

CHRIS: Well, I think that'll change. The next issue, the issue after the one I'm writing, opens with – the splash page is her in a passionate embrace with a guy and the next page is her thinking about, "Gee, when he gets out of work (smacks his lips), we're gonna have fun!"

Which is about as far from the traditional macho concept as – I don't know. It's very hard to say, really. It may be that there are different ways to write her and still maintain the heroic aspect. I'm writing the way that is most comfortable for me. I can guarantee that Len (Wein) would write her differently, Jim (Shooter) would write her differently, anyone here would write her differently. You may get to see some examples. Roger Stern's got her in the *Avengers Annual* well, she's in the Avengers. The couple of issues she's in the Defenders. I think it comes down to how each individual writer perceives her as a person and as a character, and how each writer here, regrettably, in that they're all male – his own personal view of everything. His own approach to the work, and his approach to the character.

So, it's a question that kind of has no anwer. She (Valeria) is partly right, she's partly – not so right. Not wrong – just there are a lot of shades of right. And if my instincts are wrong, the book'll probably die, or at least it won't sell any better. I can't really blame it on anyone but myself, 'cause I've been writing it. Whatever the book is, it's about 85% what I've made it. Because I've been the primary motive force more than any of the artists. I've been around on it longer. What elements are there are there 'cause I put them there, for the most part. From here on in it's wait and see.

WONDER WOMAN REVISITED

Revisited? Well, few people know, and perhaps fewer believe, that Brent Anderson and I have made not one but two visits to the soundstage and sets where the principal photography for the "Wonder Woman" TV show is done.

Our first visit and private tour of The Burbank Studios (TBS) was on our way to the 1977 San Diego Comic Con. (TBS is owned by Warner Brothers and Columbia Pictures.) Besides WW, other shows currently headquartered at TBS include "Fantasy Island" and "The Waltons."

We found the WW show in the first few days of production for the 1977/78 season. Lynda was wearing a purple blouse, gaucho skirt, and black boots, and was stepping through one of the opening scenes of the first show. Diana Prince, just returned from Paradise Island to the outside world, is arriving at the IADC (Inter-Agency Defense Command) for her first day on the job. Lynda walks down the hall towards the camera, stops in front of an office door, brushes back her hair, braces herself, enters, and introduces herself to the secretary. Lyle Wagner is setting off camera, smoking, and acting (justifiably) bored.

Numerous takes later, the director finally gets what he wants and a lunch breaks is called, and Brent and I are left wondering how they manage to film an hour show per week when it takes so long to film such a short (about 15 seconds) take. On her way out, I approached Lynda and got her to sign a photo for me.

Scene. One year later. Brent and I are on our way back from the 1978 San Diego Con. A crew was filming some bad guys being bounced around in an old stock room set temporarily set up against the south sound stage wall. They were working on the fourth episode of the season where Roddy McDowell, as the villain, attempts to turn WW into a living statue. The sets of the IACD and Diana Prince's apartment were in total disarray and indicated that it had been some time since they were in use. WW's plane was also setting off to one side gathering dust. Roddy McDowell and Lynda's WW stunt double arrived on stage. But as time passed it became obvious that everyone was awaiting Lynda who had just completed a standing ovation show in Las Vegas.

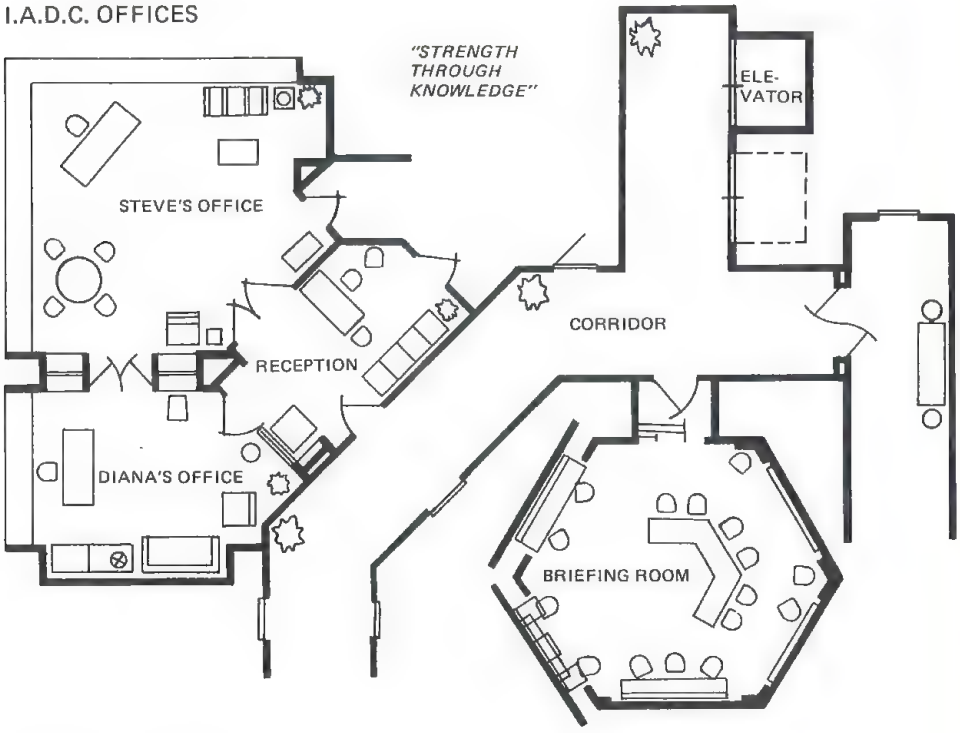
We make note of the fact that WW's stunt double is wearing flat soled (no heels) boots, and not endowed with Lynda's figure, has clear plastic shoulder straps supporting her costume. For back-figure and long-distance shots she adequately passes as WW's double, but up close there is only one Lynda Carter.

That fact was born out as the general hum of activity picked up when Lynda arrived on stage later that afternoon. And much to our delight, she was in costume this time. A series of takes were made with Lynda which when spliced together with the shots taken earlier in the day, give the viewer the impression that WW is tossing around the bad guys while actually they had been bouncing around of their own volition as we had seen.

In between takes, I got Lynda to sign an additional three photos for me, and before she was called back before the cameras, she briefly commented that she hadn't seen one of the stills before, and that the other two were somewhat older shots of herself.

That about wrapped our visit to the WW set. Plans for future visits? Perhaps a longer conversation with Lynda? Maybe even an interview? Well, there's always next year! — *Steve Johnson*

I.A.D.C. OFFICES



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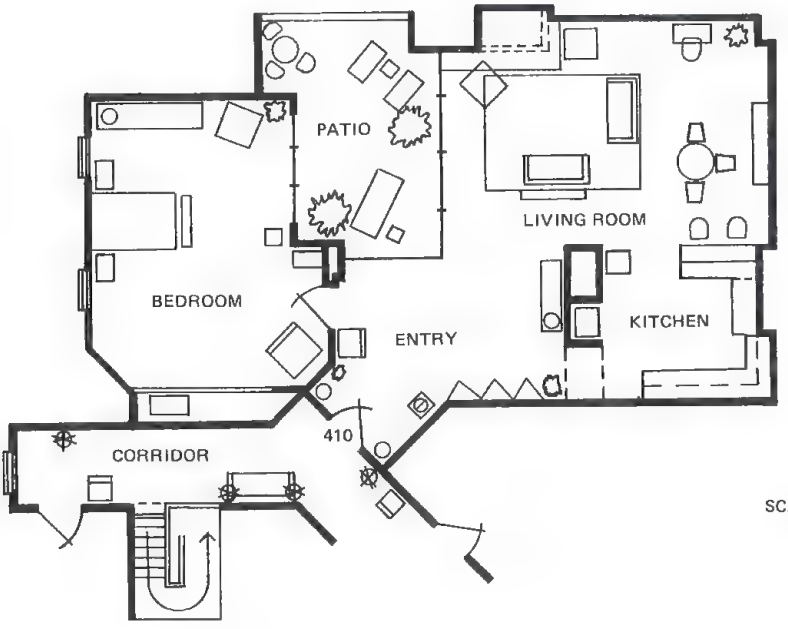

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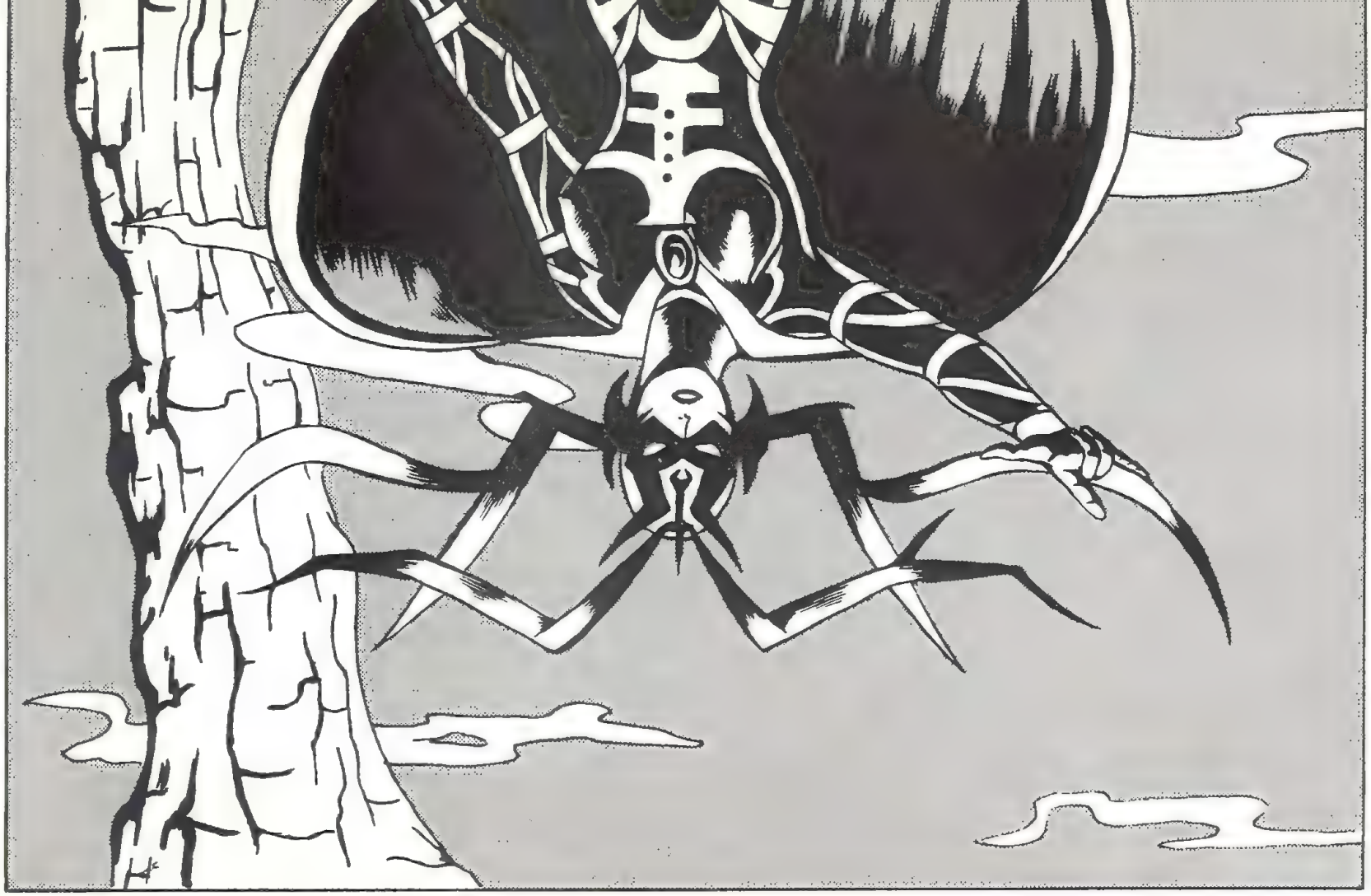

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DEFINING GOOD GIRL ART:

A MODEST PROPOSAL

by Trina Robbins

The advent of the newest frontier in comic collecting, Good Girl Art, as heralded in the latest issue of Bob Overstreet's Price Guide, has brought with it some understandable confusion. Do the words "Good Girl Art," a term coined by Carl Macek, pertain to art about good girls? Surely not, if one is to include for instance, Eisner's magnificent villainesses. Then perhaps it means good artwork about girls? Alas, copies of something called *Slave Girl Comics*, which **Before Price Guide** nobody knew, or cared, if they existed, were on sale at the San Diego Comic Con **After Price Guide** for $200, and they were definitely *not* good art. Yet, all the dealers who where selling the book had, next to their $200 price tag, the words "Good Girl Art."

Having therefore decided that the term needs further clarification, I propose dividing Good Girl Art into four categories:

1) **Good Good Girl Art.** This category would cover all well drawn heroines, from Sheena and Tiger Girl through Wonder Woman as drawn by H. G. Peters, and including Torchy Todd, Namora, and Venus.

2) **Bad Good Girl Art.** Rulah, Jungle Goddess, is definitely a badly drawn good girl. So are Nyoka, Invisible Scarlett O'Neill and Moon Girl.

3) **Good Bad Girl Art.** That's obvious. Dragon Lady, Burma, and Copper Calhoun fit here, as well as Sand Saref and every woman besides Ellen Dolan that Eisner ever drew.

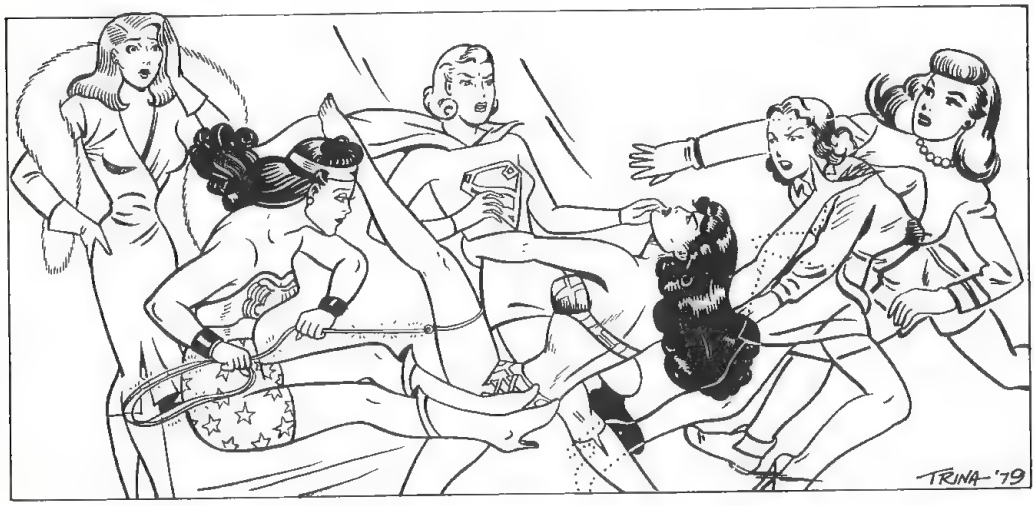
On the other hand, *Crimes By Women* is definitely

4) **Bad Bad Girl Art.**

One could, if one wanted to, add a *fifth* category; **Mediocre Nice Girl Art.** Supergirl belongs here, as does the Invisible Girl and most of Marvel's other superheroines.

It has been pointed out to me that there is room for a *sixth* category, **Good Ghoul Art**, which would include Vampirella and E.C. stories by the great "Ghastly" Ingels, but I feel that this is stretching the original concept more than I care to.

After all, if you're going to go that far, you might as well make room for a *seventh* category; **Ron Goulart.**



The Spirit Section

The Heroines Showcase

SUNDAY, JANUARY 14, 1979

ACTION Mystery ADVENTURE

ALL CHARACTERS ©1979 WILL EISNER

ART ©1979 DENIS McFARLING

During its 12 year run (from 1940-1952), *The Spirit*, Will Eisner's weekly newspaper comic book, acquired a well-deserved reputation for providing readers with a wide and appealing range of female characters. To this day, no other comic series has showcased such a sheer *abundance* of womanly pulchritude and power. Any attempt to catalogue *all* the myriad of women who populated *The Spirit* would doubtless fill a book, so this article offers nothing more than a simple review of the major female characters in the series, along with some thoughts about the underlying theme which they represent.

Least any reader who is not familiar with *The Spirit* be misled, I would like to preface these remarks by stating that, although many of the finest espisodes *do* employ the archetypical femmes fatale for which Eisner is justifiably famous, the vast majority of the stories are as varied as the man could make them, within the context of a weekly comic book. There are crime stories, encounters with extraterrestrials, slice-of-life dramas, holiday-theme fables, science fiction stories, poignat vignettes of ghetto life, detective whodunits, children's stories, exotic locale spy melodramas, parodies of other comics and of radio shows, romantic tragedies, slapstick farces, sports stories, and even complete episodes in rhyme. In short, *The Spirit* printed just about every kind of story into which a freelance masked crimefighter could be shoehorned - and when Eisner *couldn't* find any logical way to introduce his ostensible Hero into the plot, he simply omitted him for that week! Thus, while to speak of "The Spirit Women" is to focus on a valid aspect of the series, it must be understood that indulging in such tunnel vision prevents my making mention of the many other, equally fascinating innovations in both art and story which have made this strip one of the most-swiped comics in America.

Because the protagonist of *The Spirit* was a man, it is obvious that the easiest way for Eisner to introduce women into the series was either as adversaries or as lovers. Typically, he took this idea to extremes by combining both roles in virtually every woman he created. In addition to the tantalizing "good-bad girl" paradoxes which plague him, The Spirit's relationships with his female acquaintances are complicated by the fact that the women are invariably sexually attracted to him and Denny Colt, an otherwise extremely virile man, is in perpetual retreat from their importunate advances. Eisner has said that he sees The Spirit as "the epitome of the 1932, '33 male movie star who was very attractive but really was innately very shy with women," but ultimately The Spirit's view of women, compounded in equal parts of deep love and deep fear, is a reflection of Will Eisner's own lifelong fascination with what he calls the "strong and essential" woman or "the skinny, neurotic . . . " *sexy* woman who's got an intellectual problem." His homages to this "essential" woman in all her guises verge at times upon mythic poetry – without ever losing sight of the broad humour inherent in such an obsession.

The first of Eisner's heroine-villainesses, introduced in 1940, was The Black Queen, a lawyer who not only defended male criminals in court, but led her own mob on the side. When she was engaged in extralegal activities, she wore a cloak emblazoned with an ace of spades. In her third appearence, a few months later, The Black Queen also has the distinction of becoming the first of a long list of Eisner characters to commit suicide rather than face a jail sentence.

Meanwhile, Eisner was also introducing readers to his delightful sense of the absurd – starting with a man named Homer Creap, he began to provide almost every new character, no matter how minor, with a descriptive or punning name. The women in particular benefitted from this charming Eisnerian touch, going under such appelations as Peppi Tamale, Pantha Stalk, Sparrow Fallon, River Lily, Lorelei Rox, Power Puff, Flaxen Weaver, Rolla Ball, Wisp O'Smoke, Briget Doon, Dulcet Tone, Skinny Bones, Thorne Strand, "Wild" Rice, "Ice" Waters, and, of course, the unforgetable Silk Satin, Sand Saref and P'Gell of Paris.

By contrast with these flamboyant females, The Spirit's leading lady, Ellen Dolan, seems quite tame indeed – and the very ordinariness of her name serves to emphasise the fact. Ellen first appears in the second *Spirit* story, as a plain-Jane type affianced to the well-named Homer Creap. At the end of this episode, The Spirit removes Ellen's glasses, ruffles up her hair and reveals her as the blonde beauty she unknowingly was all along. Of course she immediately falls in love with Denny and breaks off her engagement to Homer. This type of scene was a

very popular humourous device in films of the time – and it still remains (without the saving grace of humour) as a standard put-down of independent women in comics today. To Eisner's credit, he never went very far with this kind of thing, mainly because to do so would have effectively ended Ellen's tenure as a "strong and essential" woman.

Although Ellen is the weakest of the "strong" women, she is no slouch when it comes to pugilism. Eisner delighted in pitting her against a variety of unlikly foes and watching her punch them out with a quick right to the eye. Ellen got her start in this line in a 1940 episode wherein she decides to become a detective and lands among a gang of crooks. In order to protect his own disguise as a mob member, The Spirit is forced to knock her out, giving her a black eye. Once the criminals have been captured, Ellen enrolls in a "muscle building" course and stomps back to Denny, demanding that he kiss her. When he pulls away and asks her to "stop this nonsense," she hauls off and knocks him unconscious. The real clincher comes in the last panel where The Spirit can be seen back at his cemetery hideout, looking up at the ceiling in a literally love-struck daze and saying to his sidekick, Ebony White, "She got me, pal, she got me!"

The tables were turned one month later, though, when Ellen, now in college and harbouring a wild crush on The Spirit, involves the masked crime fighter in a dizzy farce designed to get him to take her to the prom. The beautifully executed splash panel for this story (which Eisner later dismissed as having "an *Archie* type plot") shows Denny turning Ellen over his knee and spanking her, a situation which is rendered ludicrous by his knock-kneed position, his incredible clodhopper shoes and the fact that his face is covered with lipstick kisses.

There is more to Ellen than just man-chasing jokes, however. For one thing, The Spirit is genuinely fond of her. When he reads in the paper that she is engaged to marry private investigator Willie Ankel (in a 1949 story entitled "The Masked Man") the news visibly unnerves him, and when she agrees to marry a police officer (in the 1949 "Ice), The Spirit is so upset that he rushes in and proposes to her himself, leading to an engagement which is only terminated three weeks later when Ellen brains her fiance with a baseball bat because he mumbles another woman's name while semi-conscious.

For the most part, Ellen is played as a marriage-minded middle class girl – a sort of big-city version of Al Capp's Daisy Mae before she captured Li'l Abner. In one of the stranger episodes in the series ("Future Death," 1951), a time-traveller who journeys from 1950 to 1970 comes back and reports that in the future Denny and Ellen are married and have a child. This off-beat tale is best seen as an "alternate future" story, nowever, because the world the time-traveler describes is nothing like "our" 1970 was, and in addition he claims that he killed The Spirit in 1970, when, as any reader of the current *Spirit* reprint mags knows, Denny Colt is alive, well and SINGLE at this date.

The key to The Spirit's on and off relationship with Ellen lies in his need for freedom to pursue an adventurous life. In addition to this he says that he hates "possessive women." For all her spunk, Ellen Dolan is not a heroine – rather she represents security, the wistful desire for a quiet normal life which must plague every hero when he knows his heroics are going wrong, when he needs a harbour in the storm. Over and over again it is Ellen's name which Denny calls when he lies at death's door . . . except in the 1951 melodrama "Heat," where he calls *three* women's names! Apparently it is not only a need for independence which keeps Denny Colt from capitulating to Ellen there is also the small matter of his passionate love for another woman or two.

If Ellen is unique among The Spirit's women, all the adversary heroines seem to share a certain similarity. They all suffer, as Eisner says, from a "weltshmertz syndrome" – that is, they have been wounded by life, an excuse which somehow serves to justify their outlaw activities. Silk Satin, a former jewel thief turned insurance investigator for Croyd's of Glasgow, is the most heroine-like of this type. Although she is somewhat of an adventuress, it is her desire to provide some sort of security for her daughter Hildie which leads her into her tightest scrapes. Satin is one of the few heroic *mothers* in the genre and, unlike Marvel's Sue Storm Richards, she takes her child with her into some very dangerous spots. Satin can be seen as The Spirit's female counterpart. Like Denny Colt, she is unlucky in love. Her marriage to murderer Kurt Van Breck (in the moving 1949 melodrama entitled "Satin") is analogous to Colt's tragic affair with the outlaw Sand Saref. Because they were so similar, Satin and The Spirit mask their love for one another beneath a veneer of comradeship and professional rivalry. But in "Surgery" (1949) when Denny Colt has been shot in the legs and only the missing Dr. Anshluss can save him from an amputation, it is Satin who calls the sobbing Ellen a "little fool" and tells her, "You just sit there and weep! *I'll* show you what can be done for the man you love!" Anshluss is found, The Spirit's leg is saved – and Satin stoically walks off, a single tear glistening on her cheek, as Ellen kneels beside The Spirit's bed.

"Poor troubled Satin," as Commissioner Dolan calls her, is not always such a tragic figure, though. Eisner's constant sudden shifts from pathos to humour sometimes result in Satin's outsmarting The Spirit and leaving him helpless – a position he always accepts with the utmost grace by sticking his tongue in his cheek and his hands in his pockets, as if to tell the audience, "She got me, pal, she got me!"

One step farther down the line from "good girl" to villainess lies my favourite Spirit woman, Denny's childhood sweetheart, Sand Saref. Although she only made her first appearance toward the end of the series, in 1950, Sand was immediately given a place of importance next to Ellen and Satin in The Spirit's heart; she is one of the three women whose name he calls while bleeding to death in "Heat." As told in a very dramatic two-part tale ("Sand Saref" and "Bring in Sand Saref"), Sand and Denny grew up together in the Slum Bully section of Central City. Sand's father was a police officer and Denny was living with his uncle, a petty criminal. One night tragedy strikes – Denny's uncle's mob kills Officer Saref – and in remorse, Denny's uncle kills himself. From this moment Sand and Denny grow apart. Ironically, he decides to become a criminologist, motivated by a desire to prevent such tragedies, while Sand determines to avoid the fate of her father by becoming an outlaw. Even after he begins working for the police, Denny tries to warn Sand about an upcoming raid – and later, as The Spirit, he goes so far as to destroy evidence against her so that the police won't implicate her in a shooting. When these star-crossed lovers finally meet again on the 34th St. pier under a full moon, the term "movies on paper" becomes real. Denny looks at her with a false bravado, "So . . . at last I meet the notorious Sand Saref!"

"Don't be coy with me, Spirit. All these years and a mask don't fool me . . . Denny Colt!"

Tearfully, with a passion born of desperate longing, they embrace each other.

And for once, Denny Colt does not retreat. Quite the opposite, in fact – as the police begin to surround the pier, he is holding Sand, begging her to stay and start a new life with him.

She pulls away, tears streaming down her face. "No . . . no dice, Denny . . . A little while ago I would have jumped at the offer, but I see now its impossible. You're a *cop*, and you'd

have to turn me in . . . I'm too deeply involved in this . . . All I ask is a five minute handicap."

"Sure . . . but, SAND . . . but . . . " A deep kiss drowns out The Spirit's anguished protest – and Sand escapes in a seaplane just as the Police Commissioner arrives on the spot. When Dolan asks, "Who's in that plane?" The Spirit stares at the ground and can't meet his eyes.

"Forget it, Dolan," he mutters, ". . . forget it."

Sand never does go straight. In the six week "Jewel of Gizeh" story (1950), her ambiguity is touching – she treads a hair thin line between working with a band of crooks and saving The Spirit's life from them – but in the end, after spending two weeks marooned on a desert island with each other, they part and go their separate ways . . . Denny to return the Jewel to its rightful owners . . . and Sand to swindle it away from them in the last panel.

The mutual jealousy between Sand and Ellen forms the basis for some humourous stories, but I find these distasteful – their pettiness is matched by sloppy artwork, as if Eisner himself doubted the wisdom of bringing the two women together. I would rather remember Sand as Denny does while bleeding his life away in a dirty alley.

"Use't'be in love with Sand . . . wonder where she is? . . . "

The most prominent, most venal, and most blatantly criminal of The Spirit's female adversaries is the infamous P'Gell of Paris. In addition to her other qualities, she is, according to her creator, "a very sex-oriented girl," but she, more than any woman, seems to freeze the blood in Denny Colt's veins. With good reason – she has tried to kill the crime fighter almost as often as she has tried to seduce him. From her first appearance in 1946 ("I'm P'Gell . . . and this is NOT a story for little boys!!") to her most recent appearance in 1973, it is obvious that P'Gell will use any weapon, including her body, to gain her ends. She has had seven husbands, countless lovers, and she keeps half the men she has met in a state of thrall, ready to die at her bidding.

P'Gell's status as bitch-queen supreme did not develop at once; in the 1946 episode entitled "Caramba," she is half in love with The Spirit and, like the later Sand Saref, she saves his life from a band of criminals, one of whom, Pantha Stalk, is as cruel a woman as P'Gell herself would later become. By 1973 (in the underground story "The Capistrano Jewels") P'Gell and The Spirit are utterly at odds, and there is something really perverse about the way she covers the trussed Denny Colt with jewels she has acquired from her lesbian lover and throws herself atop him, murming, "Take me! Take me! Take me!" Her offer is so false that The Spirit doesn't even bother to get shy – he simply tells her that he will jail her if he gets the chance. P'Gell's response is to attempt to blow him sky high with explosives planted in one of the jewels, but typically, when that plan falls through she produces two airline tickets and invites him to join her on a trip to Brazil, where she hopes to rob a bank.

Actually, P'Gell's utter corruption is charming in a sort of farcical way. Even The Spirit laughs at the ease with which she manages to dupe men with her sweet-voiced, baby-eyed act. When he himself is the dupe, he takes it all rather well, placing a beefsteak to the eye she has blackened or chuckling from his hospital bed, "That was no lady, that was P'Gell."

P'Gell is an institution, a force of nature. When she returns to Paris the divorce rate soars and old men get a new lease on life. When she leaves, suicides increase and hardening of the arteries sets in. "Really," she pouts as she smokes a cigarette in an ivory holder and sensually runs her fingers through her hair, "What is there about me that simply *invites* trouble?" Poor misunderstood P'Gell. But then a woman has to get along *somehow* in this cruel, hard world, doesn't she?

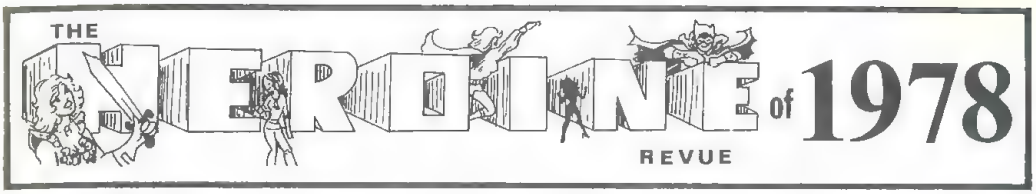
Eisner admits that in many ways his art and his approach to story-telling owe a debt to the movies of the time. Nowhere is this more evident than in his handling of female characters, many of whom reflect his great love for actress Lauren Bacall. He say, "Bacall was a *tremendous* influence on me – I was *fascinated* with her and very attracted to her kind of woman. There was a whole series of women like Lauren Bacall and Katherine Hepburn in the movies at that time, during the Bogart era."

Just as Bacall played many different roles, so did the primordial Eisner Woman shine through the hundred guises into which he cast her. The various personas are simply facets of an underlying unity. Symbolic of this basic single identity is the fact that most of The Spirit's women share a number of common traits. They are outlaws or the lovers of criminals, they have an almost archetypical desire to possess fabulous jewels, they are sexually attracted to Denny Colt, and the majority of them are given a set of extenuating circumstances to account for their less than honourable behaviour. The usual excuse, one which Eisner also supplied for many of his male criminals, is that the poverty of a ghetto childhood hand driven them into a life of crime. The constant repetition of this theme, far from becoming cliche, represents a genuine cry of outrage against an indifferent society. Will Eisner was himself a child of the ghetto and his dramas are always tinged with a painful realism that betrays his obvious sympathy for people who have been abused beyond their ability to cope in any "normal" way. The few adventuresses who are not motivated by some deep psychic scar (women such as Monica Veto and Thorne Strand) are treated with contempt by The Spirit, whereas "wounded" women like Satin, Sand and P'Gell are accorded anything from grudgin respect to outright love.

Denny Colt has said (in a hilariously schizophrenic "interview" with Will Eisner, published in Warren's *Spirit* #3) that "underlying (the excitement and danger) is the feeling that I am a strong virile member of the dominating gender, and that the woman is up against odds so great that when she *does* prevail it's interesting and unique." He then accuses Eisner of using the comic book as a vehicle for "working out his own fantasies" about women, and snidely asked him if he had "a dominating mother." Eisner replies, "That's unfair. I've given you women that are capable in their own right." This discussion between creator and character degenerates into a name-calling contest, with both men accusing each other of being "male chauvinist pigs," a term that Eisner again used when I interviewed him for *The Comics Journal*. He made it clear then, however that when he uses the phrase, "it is with some tongue in cheek" and that actually The Spirit's first remark, that Eisner is working out his own fantasis of "capable" women is closer to the truth.

Wild and florid as these fantasies are, they do tend to run in certain well-worn grooves. Although each woman is provided with a distinctive name and a unique hairdo, the best of them seem to be variations on the three major types developed most fully in the perons of Silk Satin, Sand Saref and P'Gell. Thus there is the P'Gell-like Pantha Stalk who dresses in jodhpurs and carries a whip, the Silk Satin-like Dr. Silken Floss who nobly and tearfully tears up a marriage contract she has duped The Spirit into signing, and the Sand Saref-like jewel thief Flaxen Weaver, who spares The Spirit's life and then drives her getaway car off a bridge, killing her fellow gangsters.

For a self-confessed "male chauvinst pig," Eisner does an amazing job of breaking sex-role stereotypes – particularly when one considers that these stories were written over 30 years ago. Not all the women he created were criminals, by an means, and the range of professions they follow is quite wide. Silken Floss is a doctor, both The Black Queen and the later Slip Claws *(continued on pg. 34)*



A LOOK AT THE DISTAFF SIDE OF SUPER-HEROES IN THE PAST YEAR

by Scott Gibson

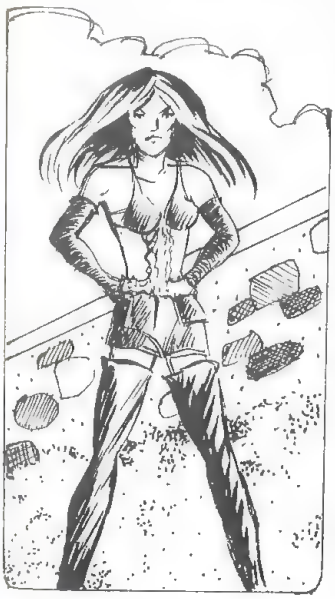
1978 was a good year for heroines. Not as spectacular, perhaps, as the past couple of years have been, but that observation applies to heroes, as well. The resurgent interest in costumed crimefighters seems to have peaked now, although it has not yet begun to decline at any alarming rate. Consequently, there is much ground to cover, for heroines were very busy this year.

MOST APPEARANCES MOST POPULAR

As she has been wont to do nearly every year since her "birth," Wonder Woman was easily the busiest and most frequently seen heroine of 1978. In addition to appearing regularly in five magazines (*Wonder Woman, Super Friends, Justice League of America, World's Finest*, and *Adventure Comics*), she guested in several other books, sported two weekly television series (her own prime time CBS offering and the Saturday morning entry, "Super Friends"), a special tabloid edition (*Superman Vs. Woner Woman*), her own Dollar-Sized Spectacular and the new newspaper strip which she shares with her fellow Justice Leaguers. Add to this the occasional appearances of her Earth II counterpart in the pages of *All Star Comics,* and you have one of the most identifiable figures in fiction today.

Trailing far behind in appearances, but giving The Amazing Amazon her most formidable challenge in the popularity department is Marvel's Red Sonja. Sonja chalked up a mere handful of appearances in '78, but her cult-like popularity surely outstrips Wonder Woman's in fever and pitch. Red Sonja is history's only heroine to be regularly featured as the star of her own comic conventions.

No other super-heroine even approaches the popularity of these two, but there are several super-femmes who should be mentioned on the basis of fame and number of appearances. Heading this list is **Batgirl**, whose status as a television star (semi-regular on the Saturday morning Batman series) places her in this category more than her six appearances in *Batman Family* and her guest-shots in *Freedom Fighters* #14 & 15.



Hawkgirl – When Hawkman received a three-issue try-out in *Showcase* this past year, his wife and partner was much in evidence. Shiera Hall, now a member of The Justice League, also made frequent appearances in that title and in Hawkman's backup feature in *Detective Comics*. She has also guested on the "Super Friends" TV show a few times.

Bionic Woman – Jaime Sommers lost both her television show and her Charlton comic this year, so 1978 signals what will probably be the end of her career, although syndication and licensing may keep her before the public eye for awhile yet.

Power Girl – A three-issue *Showcase* sojourn, regular appearances in *All-Star Comics* and an electric personality combined to keep Superman's cousin in the Spotlight in '78.

Black Canary – Always much in evidence in *JLA* and *Green Lantern*, The Bird Lady sustains her own strip in *World's Finest* and even found time to make a guest appearance in *The Brave & The Bold* and multiple cameos in *Action Comics* this year.

Spiderwoman – Relatively new on the scene, Jessica Drew has her own monthly book and even crept into the pages of *The Defenders* for a guest-shot.

Ms. Marvel – Although Marvel Comics' new blonde bombshell's own magazine dropped from monthly to bi-monthly status and she discarded her outfit for an entirely different set of threads, The Divine Ms. M made guest-shots in *The Defenders* and *Marvel Team-Up* as well as joining up with *The Avengers*. She remains one of Marvel's most-seen heroines.

Invisible Girl – Although Sue Storm's wretched second-class status persists in her involvement with The Fantastic Four, she qualifies for the 'Most Appearances' list because The FF is a monthly book and it now sustains a Saturday morning show as well.

BIRTHS New heroines? Not many. Few of those who were actually born in '78 show any real lasting power. Television was the primary source of new faces this year. CBS brought forth Web-Woman, Moray and Microwoman, as well as an animated Isis, all on "Tarzan and the Super Seven." NBC's "Godzilla Power Hour" introduced Jana of the Jungle. In comics, DC gave readers a promising sweet young thing in *DC Special Series* #10. Her name? The Black Canary. True, she isn't a new superheroine, but is wasn't until this year that the people at 75 Rockefeller Center came up with an origin for Dinah Drake.

The *Super Friends* title had new heroines aplenty. The March issue, #10, introduced a new Batwoman (not another Batman spinoff), a female vampire-type who, along with several other monster-heroes, made up a sort of Justice League from another world. In #14 (November), three reluctant young women were transformed into the heroines known as The Undine, The Sylph and The Salamander.

Weird Western Tales #48 sired Cinnamon, an obscure young woman whose saga dates back to 1898. Strangely like The Spectre tales a few years back, Cinnamon's two solo tales saw the red-haired gunslinger avenging her father's death by doing in his killers. Very little potential here.

A sword and sorcery series began in the September issue of *Wonder Woman*, featuring Queen Hippolyte and a group of Amazons (who pre-date Princess Diana) on a quest to find Paradise Island. This strip, like Cinnamon, has fallen by the wayside with DC's abrupt return to 32 page comics.

Over at Marvel, *Avengers* #170 reintroduced The Bride of Ultron. Although created in 1977, "Jocasta" turned from villainess to heroine this year, and has continued to fight alongside this group since The Ultron saga ended.

In the January *Captain America* (#219), The Falcon was dispatched by SHIELD to begin training a group of super-powered agents in the artistry of super-heroing. Among the recruits is a lithe brunette beauty called The Vamp. She wears a belt which enables her to absorb the powers and skills of any opponent. The

framework for The Vamp's inclinations towards justice or villainy is already being laid out for disclosure in 1979.

Gwenny Lou Sabuki first appeared in the January *Invaders.* A spunky, spicy Japanese-American lass, Gwenny became, in #27, charged with electrical energy which enables her to "shoot" bursts of energy from her hands which are strong enough to topple even super-strong men. Issue #28 saw her take the name of Golden Girl and join Bucky, Toro and The Human Top as one of the Kid Commandos!

The mysterious Milandra and her equally perplexing sisters Askare' and Kabra guested in *Marvel Two-In-One Annual* #3, aiding The Thing and Nova in their battle with The Monitors, a group of aliens bent on conquering Earth. Little was revealed about the background and powers of the three siblings, but it was revealed that they were actually robots.

Flash Thompson's girlfriend Sha Shan also made her debut long before 1978, and she even appeared in the guise of Sister Sun in the closing months of 1977, but it wasn't until *Spectacular Spider-Man* #15 that she turned from reluctant villainess to reluctant heroine. While that particular saga was concluded in February, it is likely that Sister Sun will eventually return.

Mavel's *What If?* presented readers with pseudo female versions of both Spider-Man and Thor this year. #7 featured Betty Brant as a Spider-Girl, while #10 gave us Jane Foster in the role of Thordis.

NEAR MISSES There were several stillborn heroines and heroine strips this year, causing much disappointment among heroine fans. DC's much-lauded *Vixen* title never arrived. Big Barda's solo strip in her husband's (*Mr. Miracle's*) book was shot down when the book was axed. The Huntress's *Showcase* try-out met with the same fate. The long-promised Hellcat/Moondragon issue of *Marvel Premiere* is but a fading memory now. The rumored Satana magazine is now rumored to have been shelved.

CANCELLATIONS Comics readers' fascination with super-groups is waning. And since it is the super-group titles in which most heroines find regular work, many were left homeless and unemployed this year. Phantom Lady, Platinum, June Robbins, Jezebel, Wonder Girl, Lilith, Bumblebee, The Harlequin, Big Barda, Spirit, Pretty Pyra, Mera, Batgirl, Batwoman, Power Girl and The Huntress all lost their regular berths in '78, although the latter five found reprieve when their respective series were transplanted to other titles. And most of the others have made guest-appearances in recent months, so all is not lost. In only one instance can we be reasonably sure a heroine is gone for good - that is in the Dick Tracy newspaper strip where The Moon Maid, long a regular, was blown to smithereens.

REVIVALS On the other side of the coin, there were many revivals, some of them quite unexpected, in 1978. Who would ever have thought that Rima, The Jungle Girl would surface on television's "Super Friends?" Or that Millie Collins (Millie the Model) would turn up in *The Defenders* #65? That Tomahawk's comrade Miss Liberty would join in this year's JLA/JSA get-together? That Venus would join The Avengers in *What If?* #9? . . . Lena Thorul in *Action Comics,* Shanna The She-Devil soloing in *Hulk Magazine,* Zatanna joining the JLA, space Ghost with sidekick Jan in *TV Stars* #3, Angel O'Day, The Dolphin and many others showing up to celebrate *Showcase's* 100th issue . . . who could've predicted these?

Kaye Daye and The Mystery Analysts made a long-awaited return to the pages of *Batman.* Saucy Tigra somehow wangled herself another solo try-out, this time in *Marvel Premiere.* Nikki and her fellow Guardinas of The Galaxy were year-long guest stars in *The Avengers* while The Doom Patrol and Supergirl joined forces in *Superman Family.* Lilith returned to plague her father in *Tomb of Dracula.* Lorna Dane applied for membership with The Defenders. Duo Damsel made a rare appearance in *Superboy and the Legion.* Thundra turned up at the end of the year for a brief skirmish with Ms. Marvel, the Vision and the Black Panther in *Avengers Annual* #8. It was, indeed, a year of surprises.

NO-SHOWS Even in the midst of a multitude of heroine appearances, there were several ladies who remain in limbo. It is not surprising that long-absent lovelies like The Black Orchid and The Thorn were not seen, but it is curious that others like Medusa and

(continued on pg. 34)

CLUB NEWS by Nick Chinn

Ho-hum. Here we are again with another look-alike issue rehashing the same old thing.

Well we hope not! A great deal of time and effort goes into each issue, and we'd like to think that each issue is a unique, attractive and interesting fanzine. But from the almost non-existant response to our issue, we don't know if anyone shares this opinion. We know (think?) you're out there. Bud Plant wouldn't continue distributing THS if he wasn't selling them. So please drop us a line once in awhile and give us some feedback.

If you've been wondering, *The Adventuress #9* was not released as scheduled. And a lack of material to finish filling the issue still precludes it from going to press. So for the present TA is being dropped from its quarterly status to an intermitent schedule, and new issues will be released whenever we have enough material. Contributors are always welcome.

Over half of *The United Kingdom Heroines Showcase* #2 is camera-ready and waiting to go to the printer at this writing. If we can nail down the rest of the book, this multi-national collaberation might eventually get published. Special covers for this issue are being worked on.

The centerfold last issue (THS #15) marked the return of Rudi Franke to comic fandom. Anyone remember his old fanzine, *Voice of Fandom*? Hopefully we'll continue to see more of Rudi's work in these pages.

Missing Subscribers Dept. – This is getting to be a dusty old hat, but we feel certain that someone reading this column can help us re-establish contract with the following people so we can restart the subscriptions they've paid for: R. Michael Griswold (formerly of Houston, TX); Jerald Magid (Los Angeles, CA); Wes Smith (Paw Paw, MI); and John Wentworth (Alhambra, CA). Please help!

The 6500 sheets of paper which represented the print run of THS #15 were collated by Steve and myself in a little over two hours (we'll also be putting this issue together). And as usual Steve was assisted by Adrienne Foster in the stapling and trimming of the issue, and Lynne Pope pitched in to help get the combined mailing of THS #15 and TA #8 ready to go to the Post Office.

We're sorry to report that apparently no one caught the pun that I suggested Steve use as a *nom de plume* in writing the review of the last Wizard & Red Sonja Show in #15 (G. Hosting = ghosting). Actually Steve was "ghosting" for me as I was supposed to write the review, but as I didn't get to go to the 1978 San Diego Comic Con, I wasn't in a position to do so. I'd recommend being suspicious though if you see a byline of "Sue D. Nym" pop up in the pages of THS!

STEVE JOHNSON

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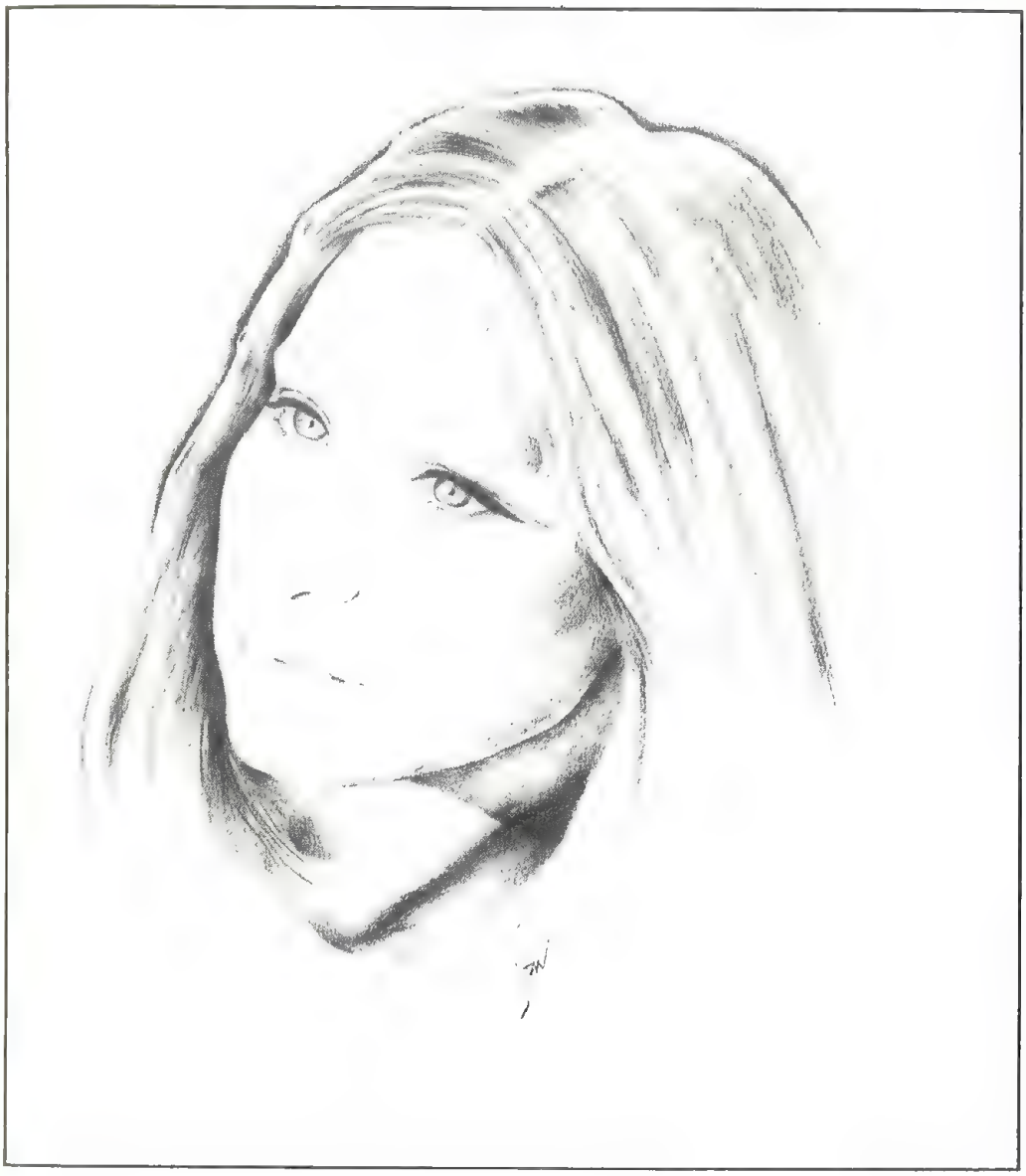

STARR FLAGG

"The Doom of Siva Dey" - *7 pgs.*

Undercover Girl #6 (A-1 Comics #98) - *1953*

Golden Age Girls *by Steve Johnson*

On assignment in India, Starr Flagg is investigating the rumors of a woman named Siva Dey who has produced a fabulous invention. And her efforts are more than fruitful when, "In the cool dimness of an ancient Mysore temple, the great statue Jain comes alive! It sweeps Undercover Girl high into the air, writhing and struggling! Living stone hands crush on bone and sinew! Starr Flagg screams once - twice -- and then realizes she is face to face with - 'The Doom of Siva Dey!'"

Breath whistling in her throat, Staff grows weaker and weaker as the cold stone hand of the giant statue tightens inexorably. As Shiva Dey gloats, Star wishes for her gun but realizes it would have no effect on the monolith.

As stone arms lift her toward the great gaping mouth, the fingers loosen their crushing grip, and a sobbing Starr chooses death from the high fall rather than the slow death of being chewed by stone teeth.

A desperate lunge, but fortunately with a shift of position in mid-air, Undercover Girl hits the canopy of an Indian statue and bounces off to a perfect four-point landing on her toes and spiked heels, with her dress billowing slightly. The statue begins to plod after the fleeing espionage girl who speeds off in her car, but Siva Dey calls it back.

Hours later, a breathless and frightened Starr Flagg rushes into intelligence headquarters in Rangalore and convinces her superior that Siva Dey has found a way to animate stone, and preparations are made to fight the living rocks.

After Siva Dey uses a demonstration of her power in a remote corner of the hill country to enlist tribesmen in her plans for world conquest, Starr returns on horseback to find Siva back at the temple.

The ensuing brawl is broken up when the stone behemoth, Jain, once again ensnares Starr within the grasp of its huge hand. Starr is manacled to an ancient wall while Siva Dey departs on the shoulder of her colossus for some looting and pilaging. Starr writhes and twists, but the hard metal of the handcuffs digs into her wrists and holds her.

Under the hot, baking sun of India, Starr suddenly realizes that she can use the heat to slightly expand her restraints and give her the tiny fraction of space she needs to free herself. The torrid sun beats down and heats the metal until it almost burns Starr's flesh. But the shackles expand, and finally her wrists slip through.

Hair: Blonde

Hours later, as a confident Siva Dey marches her

tribesmen and living statues through Mylingalan Pass, Starr springs a trap, which, with a ton of dynamite, destroys the strange secret of the living stone men.

Some days later in Calcutta, Starr gives a response to the suitability of her accomodations at the front desk of the hotel, "Everything's fine except for this statue. I don't want it in my room. There's something about a statue that gives me cold feet!"

The art on this series was by Ogden Whitney (with covers by Bob Powell). While a competent artist, Ogden is going to be better remembered for his work on *Herbie* rather than his rendering of attractive women. His women look rather solid and manly though this style seems to be well suited for Starr Flagg. This is not to say that Starr isn't feminine, but that she's a strong, capable woman; she's good at what she does and has all the skills normally associated with a 1st class spy. Still as evidenced by the sharp way she dresses, carries herself, and a few panels in her pajamas, underclothes, and putting on her nylons, she enjoys being a woman.

The biggest drawback to Starr's adventures is the plotting. The scripting is good and makes interesting reading, but this story in particular illustrates how the plotting falls flat. The story just starts, boom, with Starr being crushed by the stone statue. You don't have much of an idea of where she is, and no idea of what she is doing there or why she is there. Bits and pieces have to be gleaned from the story as you read through. It's as if a page or two was cut from the beginning of the story.

Questions are left open in the story, such as: Why does a purported inventor like Siva Dey go around in an Eastern dancing costume? Why does Starr take a horse to the temple the second time instead of her car? Why does Starr go into an uncharacteristic hysterical panic when faced with death by the statue's jaws, and only after jumping consider looking for a soft way down? The the story is wrapped in 2 panels and followed by the regularly used "teaser" panel which caps the story nicely.

The author does seem to be well knowledged and traveled. His use of names, places and things appear to be authentic though I haven't been able to check them. The first story in this issue takes her through Europe on the Orient Express where she delivers a statue with a hidden message to a British agent only to discover that he has been replaced by a Russian imposter and has to regain the statue. And in the second story, she is in South America for a meeting with an American military official when he is kidnapped by foreign agents and Starr pulls off a single-handed rescue.

It's hard to tell where the misconceptions on Good Girl Art will take the price of this book, but presently it is still a decent value.

****

The "Espionage Girl" appeared in:

Undercover Girl #5-7 (1952 - 1953)
cover app. #5-7; 3 stories #5-7
(also numbered as A-1 Comics #62,98,118)

****

Steven R. Johnson, P.O. Box 1329, Campbell, CA 95008

Hi Steve,

I'm sure you don't remember me, but we spoke in San Diego this summer. At that time I both promised to send you an order and told you what a terrible procrastinator I am. Here's the proof. The order shows up 4 months later.

In preparing this order, I went through the copies of your two great 'zines.' I spent many hours studying Lela Dowling's pics and the final result was that I went into my studio and systematically broke all my pencil and pen-points. Since I previously made my meagre living as a commercial artist, I feel that it is now the responsibility of your organization to support me and my family until I learn a new trade; one which I may be more suited to. Therefore, I will expect a check in the amount of $500 each Friday until further notice. I'm sure that you and Lela can work out this problem and will accept your responsibility in this matter. For your information, I went to the Welfare Department for support, but when I told them the details, they told me to shove off and go see Lela and Steve. As you can see, this is a government directive and I expect you to respond properly.

Since one of my delinquent customers sent me a check today, and since you will be starting my checks next week, I have decided to send in the inclosed back issue order with the knowledge that I will be well provided for in the future.

My best wishes and congratulations for the super job you are all doing. By the way, give Nick Chinn a special hello from me.

Bruce Dey
1330 W. Vine Ave.
West Covina, CA 91790

Hmm. For less than $500 a week I think that I can get Lela to stop drawing. I know that I'd quit publishing for a lesser sum than that!

On the other hand if you pay us $500 a week, Lela and I'll split the money and she'll stop drawing and I'll stop publishing! - SRJ

THE SPIRIT'S WOMEN *(cont. from pg. 26)*

are lawyers, Monica Veto is a politician, Thorne Strand owns a sports arena until she joins Long Jane Silver's all-women smuggling ring, Agent Cosmek is an extraterrestial spy, Briget Doon is an airplane pilot. There's even a tough old cop named Lizzie Pinch who functions as a foil for Dolan at one point. The one quality which these and all the other "Spirit Women" share is their strength of character. It is doubtless this image of female power Eisner is referring to when he says he wanted to create women who "were attractive to see and interesting to talk about." His care and respect for these "strong," "capable," "essential," women is revealed in every line he drew and every word he wrote. His love for them is such that, even though the vast majority are outlaws, smugglers, thieves or even murderers, he speaks of them all as "heroines."

THE HEROINE REVUE *(cont. from pg. 29)*

Aquagirl, characters who *have* been active in recent years, were missing.

CHANGES And what is a year without a few innovations? Wonder Woman's adventures switched back from Earth II and the 1940's to present-day Earth I. Ms. Marvel and Zatanna made radical costume changes. Saturn Girl quit the Legion of Super-Heroes, married and re-joined. Madame Masque pulled the ultimate switch, becoming Marvel's first villainess-turned-heroine to take up crime again. Lois Lane married Superman . . . well, on *one* world, anyhow.

* * *

Which about concludes things in a tightly-packed nutshell. We can only hope that 1979 is a kind or kinder to super-heroines as '78. Cross your fingers – maybe the coming year will be the one to finally feature your own special favorite crimestopping cutie in her own strip. Or her own book. Or TV show. Or movie. Or . . . who knows?

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FANZINE - 8 3/4" x 11" with 2" flap *Fits all 8½" x 11" publications; Playboy, etc.; early Warren black & white magazines*	100 @ $ 3.80 300 @ $10.00 1000 @ $29.25	100 @ $ 4.00 300 @ $10.50 1000 @ $30.50
TREASURY - 10 1/2" x 13 1/2" with 2 1/2" flap *Fits all Marvel and DC oversize comics ($1.00, $1.50, & $2.00 comics)*	100 @ $ 5.25 300 @ $14.25 1000 @ $43.00	100 @ $ 5.50 300 @ $15.00 1000 @ $45.00
COMIC ART - 16 3/8" x 11 3/4" with 2" flap *Fits most pages of modern comic book art; and many Sunday newspaper strips*	100 @ $ 7.00 300 @ $20.00 500 @ $32.50	100 @ $ 7.25 300 @ $20.75 500 @ $33.50
SINGLES JACKET COVER - 7 3/8" x 7 3/8" 4 mil polyethylene; no flap *Fits the outside jacket of all 45 rpm single records*	100 @ $ 3.25 300 @ $ 7.75 1000 @ $22.50	100 @ $ 3.40 300 @ $ 8.25 1000 @ $23.75
ALBUM JACKET COVER - 12 3/4" x 13" **4 mil polyethylene; no flap** *Fits the outside jacket of most record albums*	100 @ $ 6.25 300 @ $16.75 500 @ $26.00	100 @ $ 6.50 300 @ $17.75 500 @ $27.50

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